

**Amendments to the Claims:**

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

**Listing of Claims:**

Claim 1 (original): A method for an entity to establish preferred business partners via a communication network, the method comprising:

providing a vendor certification program comprising a curriculum via the communication network on a fee basis;

receiving a notification that a vendor has successfully completed the vendor certification program; and

granting certified vendor status upon the vendor indicated in the notification,

wherein the certified vendor status confers preferential consideration to the vendor during acquisition decisions by the entity.

Claim 2 (original): A computer-readable medium having stored thereon computer-executable instructions for implementing the method of claim 1.

Claim 3 (original): The method of claim 1, wherein the curriculum is based on subject matter expertise possessed by the entity.

Claim 4 (original): The method of claim 1, further comprising:

undertaking an acquisition decision;

accessing information regarding a plurality of vendors, the plurality of vendors comprising at least one vendor having certified vendor status; and

providing preferential consideration to the at least one vendor having certified vendor status when resolving the acquisition decision.

Claim 5 (original): The method of claim 1, wherein the vendor comprises a plurality of personnel, and wherein granting of the certified vendor status further comprises granting variable levels of certified vendor status such that increasing numbers of the plurality of personnel that have successfully completed the vendor certification program confers increasing levels of preferential consideration.

Claim 6 (original): The method of claim 1, further comprising providing the vendor certification program, at least in part, via a public communication network.

Claim 7 (original): The method of claim 6, further comprising providing the vendor certification program, at least in part, via either of an Internet or World Wide Web communication network.

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Claim 8 (original): The method of claim 1, further comprising providing the vendor certification program, at least in part, via a private communication network.

Claim 9 (original): A method, via a communication network, for a vendor to obtain preferred status from an entity, the method comprising:

registering for a fee-based vendor certification program provided by the entity, wherein the vendor certification program comprises a curriculum;

successfully completing the curriculum via the communication network; and

receiving, from the entity, a notification of certified vendor status in response to successful completion of the curriculum,


wherein the certified vendor status confers preferential consideration during acquisition decisions by the entity.

Claim 10 (original): A computer-readable medium having stored thereon computer-executable instructions for implementing the method of claim 9.

Claim 11 (original): The method of claim 9, wherein the curriculum is based on subject matter expertise possessed by the entity.

Claim 12 (original): The method of claim 8, wherein the vendor comprises a plurality of personnel, and wherein receiving the certified vendor status further comprises receiving variable levels of certified vendor status such that increasing numbers of the plurality of personnel that have successfully completed the vendor certification program results in increasing levels of preferential consideration.

Claim 13 (original): The method of claim 8, further comprising successfully completing the vendor certification program, at least in part, via a public communication network.

 Claim 14 (original): The method of claim 13, further comprising successfully completing the vendor certification program, at least in part, via either of an Internet or World Wide Web communication network.

Claim 15 (original): The method of claim 8, further comprising successfully completing the vendor certification program, at least in part, via a private communication network.

Claim 16 (original): An apparatus for an entity to establish preferred business partners via a communication network, the apparatus comprising:

- a network interface for communicating with the communication network;
- at least one processor coupled to the network interface; and
- at least one memory device, coupled to the at least one processor, having stored thereon executable instructions that, when executed by the at least one processor, cause the at least one processor to:

- provide a vendor certification program comprising a curriculum via the network interface on a fee basis;

- receive a notification that a vendor has successfully completed the vendor certification program; and

grant certified vendor status upon the vendor indicated in the notification,  
wherein the certified vendor status confers preferential consideration to the  
vendor during acquisition decisions by the entity.

Claim 17 (original): The apparatus of claim 16, wherein the curriculum is based on  
subject matter expertise possessed by the entity.

Claim 18 (original): The apparatus of claim 16, wherein the curriculum is stored in the at  
least one memory device.

Claim 19 (original): The apparatus of claim 16, wherein the network interface  
communicates with a public communication network.

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Claim 20 (original): The apparatus of claim 19, wherein the network interface  
communicates with either of an Internet or World Wide Web communication network.

Claim 21 (original): The apparatus of claim 16, wherein the network interface  
communicates with a private communication network.

Claim 22 (original): A system whereby an entity establishes relationships with vendors  
via a communication network, the system comprising:

a learning management component, operatively coupled to the communication  
network, that administers a vendor certification program on behalf of an entity; and

at least one database, coupled to the learning management component, comprising  
a curriculum offered as part of the vendor certification program, and comprising  
information indicating that a vendor has certified vendor status after successfully  
completing the curriculum thereby entitling the vendor to preferential consideration  
during acquisition decisions by the entity.


Claim 23 (original): The system of claim 22, wherein the curriculum is based on subject matter expertise possessed by the entity.

Claim 24 (original): The system of claim 22, further comprising:

a delivery component, coupled to learning management component, for delivering the curriculum to the vendor.

Claim 25 (original): The system of claim 22, further comprising:

a financial transaction component, coupled to the learning management component, that handles payment by the vendors for participation in the vendor certification program.



Claim 26 (original): The system of claim 22, wherein the network interface communicates with a public network.

Claim 27 (original): The system of claim 26, wherein the network interface communicates with either of Internet or World Wide Web networks.

Claim 28 (original): The system of claim 22, wherein the network interface communicates with a private network.

Claim 29 (original): An apparatus for a vendor to obtain preferred status from an entity via a communication network, the apparatus comprising:

a network interface for communicating with the communication network;

at least one processor coupled to the network interface; and

at least one memory device, coupled to the at least one processor, having stored thereon executable instructions that, when executed by the at least one processor, cause the at least one processor to:

receive a curriculum included in a vendor certification program offered by the entity via the communication network;

receive, from the entity, a notification of certified vendor status in response to successful completion of the curriculum,

wherein the certified vendor status confers preferential consideration during acquisition decisions by the entity.

Claim 30 (original): The apparatus of claim 29, wherein the curriculum is based on subject matter expertise possessed by the entity.

Claim 31 (original): The method of claim 29, wherein the network interface communicates with a public communication network.

Claim 32 (original): The method of claim 31, wherein the network interface communicates with either of an Internet or World Wide Web communication network.

Claim 33 (original): The method of claim 29, wherein the network interface communicates with a private communication network.

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Claim 34 (new): A method for an entity to establish preferred business partners via a communication network, the method comprising:

providing a vendor certification program comprising a curriculum via the communication network on a fee basis;

receiving a notification that a vendor has successfully completed the vendor certification program; and

granting certified vendor status upon the vendor indicated in the notification, wherein the certified vendor status confers preferential consideration to the vendor during acquisition decisions by the entity,

wherein the curriculum is based on subject matter expertise possessed by the entity;

undertaking an acquisition decision;

accessing information regarding a plurality of vendors, the plurality of vendors comprising at least one vendor having certified vendor status; and

providing preferential consideration to the at least one vendor having certified vendor status when resolving the acquisition decision.

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